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A German immigrant named John Zengeler opened a steam and dye shop on the South Side in 1857 using massive copper kettles, large irons and his training as a chemist to clean and color garments for the city's elite.

So strong was Chicago's hunger for clean clothes that the Zengeler business survived the Chicago Fire of 1871, the Civil War and the Great Depression.

On Saturday, A.W. Zengeler Cleaners, which has seven stores in the north suburbs, will celebrate 150 years of business.

Tom Zengeler, John Zengeler's great-great-grandson and president of A.W. Zengeler, said his company's long history illustrates how important it is for families to remain active in their businesses.

Each of the company's five presidents has worked alongside his employees. Zengeler recalled his father and grandfather rolling up their sleeves in the dry cleaning plant to inspect clothes for missing buttons and loose seams.

"It's a great family story," said Carol Levin of the GLMV Chamber of Commerce, which represents businesses in Green Oaks, Libertyville, Mundelein, and Vernon Hills. "There are a lot of lessons to be learned from them."

In May, U.S. Rep. Mark Kirk (R-Ill.) commended the family in the U.S. House. Gov. Rod Blagojevich also issued a proclamation in honor of the company's 150th anniversary.

More than 350 people, including dozens of longtime customers, are expected to attend

Saturday's party in Wheeling.

Tom Zengeler said the wife of Chicago meatpacking baron Jonathan Ogden Armour encouraged the Zengeler family to expand to the North Shore in 1906. She was impressed with the company's ability to reproduce her favorite shade of pink when asked to dye clothes, and thought the firm would thrive among her circle on the North Shore.

The family opened up shop in Lake Forest and continued to expand in the following decades. The company now has stores in Deerfield, Hubbard Woods, Libertyville, Northfield, Winnetka, Lake Bluff and Northbrook.

The company no longer has a store in Chicago, but continues to serve customers in the city through home delivery.

"I'm very proud of our accomplishments, not just from my generation, but from all the generations that came before me," Tom Zengeler said.